Context: PSL orientation towards Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Tuesday July 17 2018

INTERNAL MESSAGE

Hi comrades,

Please refrain from highly critical social media commentary of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. There may be a time when we need to sharply criticize her, and the DSA trend she represents and comes from, but that would need to be done at the proper moment after an internal Party discussion and assessment. The same is true for our approach to other forces on the left too – we do not need to criticize them whenever they do something we disagree with.

Many working-class friends of PSL members are asking us what we think of Ocasio-Cortez's primary win. That she does not have much of a record to speak of as an activist, no record as a legislator to assess, and has not yet been elected, means that few people outside of the far left will be won over at this moment by outright dismissals of her. We should have a patient orientation while upholding of course our general perspective on the importance of independent working-class politics. (It's also not impossible that the DNC and Crowley could still challenge her in the general election via the Working Families Party line.)

Here are a few talking points to consider about the significance of her win:

1. The Ocasio-Cortes election is proof that the fog of anti-communism is lifting, that we can be outspoken as socialists. That is true even though we don't define socialism the same way as her campaign did. It further motivates us to deepen our own socialist outreach in oppressed communities, including in her district.

2. Right now the corporate media and Democratic operatives have swarmed around her with one purpose: to get her to step back from any whiff of radical politics. We've heard that the volunteer DSA activists who helped get her elected have already lost quite a bit of influence as opposed to the professional operatives who are coming to give her "advice" and steer her in a different direction. The corporate media is challenging her to water down her positions too. Implicit in all this is the threat that if she doesn't bend, they will isolate her completely, discredit her, and not allow her to get re-elected. This isn't a criticism of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortes, but it shows how electoral politics actually works, what she's up against already, and what sort of backbone will be required to not end up like a rather mainstream liberal Democrat. It also shows why we shouldn't think that electoral victories like this can constitute a general strategy to advance working-class politics.

In differentiating from her politics, it's better to frame things in a way that will resonate with people who support her program and which explains that Ocasio-Cortes still has real choices to make:

1. We unite with her calls to Abolish ICE and for Medicare for All, and for a federal jobs program, among others. But how can these be won? That's the question. We don't think any of that can be really won in the halls of Congress, which is a rubber stamp for corporate power -- or if Congress would ever sign onto such a thing, it would be because they feared a truly mass people's movement. So that's what we believe socialists should be focused on in this period, and we'll assess her record based on whether she helps build that movement.

2. When we say "Abolish ICE," we don't mean a reorganization into the INS, which would not end deportations or the crimes against the immigrant community. That would only abolish ICE in name, not in fact. Ocasio-Cortez has been bowing to DNC pressure to be "realistic" on this question but the Democrats themselves wouldn't vote for their own resolution against ICE!

The other road is to unite with the mass sentiment in the immigrant community to end deportations and win full rights for all, so we think she should consider that. (edited)

3. We hope that Ocasio-Cortez will in office speak up against the Israeli atrocities against the Palestinian people, as she did earlier. She says she believes in a human rights framework for Palestine but doesn't know much about it. She's undoubtedly getting lots of advice from people who don't want her to break from the status quo on this issue too, or to avoid it altogether. But for us it's essential that Israel be called out as racist apartheid state because the human rights of Palestinians can't be protected so long as they live among a state that is predicated on the denial of those rights. One concrete way she could show that she supports Palestinian human rights is by standing up for BDS.

I'm not recommending the above as social media posts that comrades need to make -- more for in-person discussions on the street or with friends inside the movement. Of course, with more radical friends the discussion would need to be different. Short social media posts are difficult on things like this because the format forces you to speak in short-hand to an undifferentiated mass of people at different political levels. The right thing to emphasize with one person might be the wrong for another. Longer articles are often better on complicated tactical issues because they allow for a well-rounded presentation.

Although not identical, comrades should recall how our public orientation towards the Bernie Sanders campaign changed over time so as to be the most persuasive to a broad number of people who were initially energized (and later betrayed) by his candidacy. It's not that our position on Bernie evolved, but the question of what to emphasize evolved

August 2015:
https://www.liberationnews.org/psl-statement-sanders-campaign/
October 2015:
https://www.liberationnews.org/socialist-tactics-bernie-sanders-campaign/
April 2016 before the NY primary:
https://www.liberationnews.org/registered-democrats-vote-sanders-n-y-primary/
April 2016 after the NY primary (when the sharper criticism begins):
https://www.liberationnews.org/sanders-campaign-next-stage-socialist-agitation/
July 2016 at the DNC, when Bernie endorsed Hillary:
https://www.liberationnews.org/the-people-radicalized-before-our-eyes-a-week-outside-the-dnc-in-philadelphia/